

Descent

by misanthropic angel

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Summary: They have a business, a life, and the beginnings of a family. But he's slipping away, bit by bit, and they can't understand why. Shouldn't it all be okay now? Pre-AC. M for safety. Some violence/language.

Descent

I

He stood on the broken floorboards and stared up at the sky through the hole in the roof. Closing his eyes, he felt the warmth of the sun on his skin. The feeling seemed to overwhelm his thoughts until his mind became silent. It was the sort of absolute silence that this place, in all its reverence, demanded. With the noise in his head finally gone, he could almost hear her laughter again. The ghostly sound forced his mind back into gear. The peace was ruined.

He opened his eyes and searched among the flowers for the calm he had always been able to find here. Instead, he found only the familiar pain in his chest that wasn't quite physical. He closed his eyes instinctively as if to brace himself against it. When he opened them again, he found that his feet had carried him to the door. With a small sigh, he pushed the door open and was confronted with the image of a small child keeled over next to his bike, clutching his phone desperately as he cried. Eyes widening, he ran forwards and dropped to his knees beside the anguished boy.

"You okay?" The boy only cried harder.

"Hey." He reached for the phone and the boy reluctantly relinquished it. Holding it to his ear, he heard a voice that was familiar, yet so unfamiliar in its panicked state.

"Cloud?! If you're there, pick up the phone!"

"Tifa?"

"Cloud, what's going on? This boy had your phone and he wouldn't talk. He just kept crying! Is he still there? Is he okay?"

His voice was low as he spoke, half to her and half to himself. "He looks like death."

"Bring him home." She sounded confident in her decision, as if there was nothing to consider.

"Okay." He hung up the phone and placed his hands lightly on the boy's shoulders. "Tifa said to take you home." The boy raised his head slightly as if to offer a word of gratitude, then dropped it again and let his tears fall to the dusty ground beneath him.

Cloud picked up the boy and placed him gently onto the motorcycle. He tried to look calm and reassuring but the boy refused to meet his gaze. Abandoning the idea, and being quietly confident that Tifa would do a better job of it anyway, he climbed onto the bike and told the boy to hold on. Rather than the arms around his waist that he'd expected, he felt the boy's trembling body collapse against his back. The pain in his chest doubled and his breath caught in his throat. He reached behind him and took the boy's arm, placing it around his middle. As he looked down, he saw the boy's hand trembling, unable to hold on. He held it tightly in his own, steadied his breathing, and drove. And despite all that he had been through, all the battles he had fought and won, all the strength he had gained, he felt entirely unprepared for this. And the white noise in his head that he'd been trying to silence in the Church was suddenly replaced with a single, discomforting and unfamiliar realisation: he was afraid.

End
file.